

Running head: HOW TO ENGAGE IN CONVERSATION

How to Engage in Effective Conversation

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### Abstract

Conversation skills are essential for success in social, school, and business settings. They are foundational to deep relationships and lifelong friendships. Job applicants leave a more favorable impression with good conversation skills. Employees with these skills are more likely to climb the company ladder than those who struggle with conversation. Research suggests that good conversation skills can lead to peer acceptance and a safer school environment. Through lecture, small and large group activities, participants are taught these skills. Then they are given the opportunity to practice the steps to effective conversation. Participants complete a pretest so they can chart progress and create goals. A posttest is given at the end of the unit.

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## **OVERVIEW OF *PRESENTING YOU* COURSE OBJECTIVES**

### **The Give and Take of Conversation**

#### **Session 1 – Beginning a Conversation**

As the end of Session 1, trainees will be able to:

- A. Define conversation and explain why it is important.
- B. Describe and demonstrate the HENS method of introduction.
- C. Name four categories of icebreakers (conversation starters) appropriate for social and business settings and give an example of each.

#### **Session 2 – Keeping a Conversation Going**

At the end of Session 2, trainees will be able to:

- A. Define active listening and tell why it is important.
- B. Identify an interest(s) of the other person by responding with related comments and asking open questions.

#### **Session 3 – Ending a Conversation**

At the end of Session 3, trainees will be able to:

- A. Give examples of how to politely close a conversation.



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***PRESENTING YOU – The Give and Take of Conversation***

The goal is to equip young people to present themselves with confidence in social and professional settings. Trainees will be taught in one-on-one or small group sessions.

***The Significance of Good Conversation Skills***

While some feel as if conversation is a futile task, the truth is that effective conversation is a building block to the foundation of a deeper relationship. A conversation with a stranger or an acquaintance often begins with small talk. Then small talk paves the way to a more intimate conversation, laying the foundation to a close friendship.

Conversation skills are important in the school setting. Research suggests that good social skills lead to a positive and safe school environment (NASP, 2002).

Unfortunately, the reverse is true as well. Poor social skills can lead to peer rejection which can then lead to aggression and, consequently, an unsafe school environment. An integral part of good social skills is the ability to engage in conversation.

Much attention has also been given to this topic in the corporate setting. Not only are managers hiring based on an applicant's IQ but their EQ as well. EQ is defined as one's emotional quotient which refers to his/her interpersonal skills. Once again, a necessary component of interpersonal skills is one's ability to engage in small talk and conversation.

While some handle conversation with ease, for others, engaging in conversation can be a challenge. A great benefit of this course is that anyone can succeed. As with any skill, mastering the steps and then practicing them are the best ways to become proficient at effective conversation.

***PRESENTING YOU – The Give and Take of Conversation***

**TASK ANALYSIS**

- I. Introduce yourself and greet the speaker using the HENS method (handshake-eye contact-use of name-smile)
- II. Select an appropriate icebreaker or conversation starter
  - A. Icebreakers for social settings
    1. Refer to the physical setting
    2. Refer to your thoughts and feelings
    3. Refer to another person
    4. Use humor or a light-hearted remark
  - B. Icebreakers for business settings
    1. Refer to the physical setting
    2. Refer to your thoughts and feelings
    3. Refer to another person
    4. Use humor or a light-hearted remarks
- III. Engage in active listening to discover a connection or commonality
- IV. Respond with related comments and ask open questions to identify an interest(s) of the speaker
- V. Close the conversation politely



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***PRESENTING YOU - The Give and Take of Conversation*****NEEDS ANALYSIS - PRETEST**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This questionnaire is designed to help you to identify your specific area(s) of need.

**Directions:** Rate your training skill using a 1-5 scale.

1 = low skill and 5 = high skill

\_\_\_\_\_ I am aware that conversation is essential for personal and professional success. 1A

\_\_\_\_\_ I introduce myself and meet people with confidence. 1B

\_\_\_\_\_ I have a handshake that fits my personality. 1B

\_\_\_\_\_ I engage and maintain eye contact with the other person during an introduction. 1B

\_\_\_\_\_ I make sure to use the other person's name during an introduction. 1B

\_\_\_\_\_ I smile during an introduction. 1B

\_\_\_\_\_ I select appropriate icebreakers or conversation starters for social settings. 1C

\_\_\_\_\_ I select appropriate icebreakers or conversation starters for business settings. 1C

\_\_\_\_\_ I engage in active listening by demonstrating open and warm body language. 2A

\_\_\_\_\_ I make an effort to discover a connection or commonality with the other person. 2A

\_\_\_\_\_ I make related comments and ask related questions to identify the speaker's topic(s) of interest. 2B

\_\_\_\_\_ I practice the concept of taking turns while conversing. 2B

\_\_\_\_\_ I recognize conversation stoppers and avoid them. 2B

\_\_\_\_\_ I close the conversation politely. 3A

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Points

# TRAINING UNIT

***PRESENTING YOU*****The Give and Take of Conversation****Class Size – 6-8 Trainees (Can be adapted for One-on-One)****Time allotted - 120 Minutes****Conversation Skills Learning Objectives****Session 1 – Beginning a Conversation***At the end of Session I, trainees will be able to:***1. Define conversation and explain why it is important.**

Time allotted - 20 minutes

***Small group activity and icebreaker (3-4 in each group)*** – Have trainees reflect for one minute upon this question: What is conversation? They can write notes on their handout if they want. Then each group will be given 27 cards. Each card will have one of the words contained in the definition of conversation. Before seeing the definition, they will be asked to place the cards in appropriate order. Explain that the punctuation has been left out in order to make it more of a challenge.

They will try to be the first group finished.

Definition - Conversation is an exchange of information between 2 or more people through talking and listening which results in a sharing of thoughts, feelings, ideas, interests, and experiences.

***Lecture and discussion*** – Go over the definition in detail. Explain the importance of conversation and small talk: can be the foundation to a close relationship, can lead to a safer school environment, can improve ability to get employed and advance up the corporate ladder. Share anecdote about the introverted engineer

who watched extraverted engineers with the same qualifications get promoted faster (Fine, 2005). Share how companies are hiring for IQ and firing for EQ.

**Materials needed** – Four sets of 27 flash cards with the words to the definition of conversation written on them. Flipchart #1 and Flipchart #2 and markers. Session 1 Handout.

## **2. Describe and demonstrate the HENS method of introduction.**

Time allotted - 15 minutes

**Lecture and discussion** – Short explanation of each step followed by demonstration.

H – Handshake

E – Eye contact

N – Use of name “Remember that a person’s name is to that person the sweetest sound in any language (Carnegie, 1981).

S – Smile “After weeks of testing the appearance, personality, and attitudes of subjects and their influence on others, professors at Yale University discovered that a smile is the single most powerful force of influence that people have” (Ziglar, 2006).

**Large group activity** – Trainees will practice the HENS method by standing up and introducing themselves to each person in the group. They will do this several times simultaneously. Trainees will then be asked to give positive feedback on how their fellow trainees did with each of the steps.

**Materials needed** – Flipchart #3 and markers. Session 1 Handout.

**3. Name four categories of icebreakers (conversation starters) appropriate for social and business settings and give an example of each (Verderber, K.S., Verderber, R. F., & Berryman-Fink, 2007).**

Time allotted – 20 minutes

***Lecture and discussion*** - Appropriate icebreakers for social and business settings.

**A. *Refer to the physical context.***

Social: “This is great weather for a game, isn’t it?”

Business: The remodeled offices look great. When they will be finished?

**B. *Refer to your thoughts and feelings.***

Social: “I thought the movie last night was great! What did you think about it?”

Business: “I like our new policy of Fridays off. What about you?”

**C. *Refer to another person.***

Social: “Tom will be at the game tonight. Are you planning to go?

Business: “I don’t believe we’ve met before. Do you work with Sue?”

**D. *Use humor or a light-hearted remark.***

Social: “Isn’t it great how we have had 30 days of 100+degrees temperature?”

Business: “The price of our health insurance keeps going up while our benefits keep going down.”

***Small group activity*** – Trainees will work together to make up examples of appropriate icebreakers (1 for social setting and 1 for business setting) to fit each category.

***Large group activity*** – Trainees will share examples with large group.

***Materials needed*** – Flipchart #4 and markers. Session 1 Handout.

## Session 2 – Keeping a Conversation Going

*At the end of Session 2, trainees will be able to:*

### **1. Define active listening and tell why it is important.**

Time allotted– 20 minutes

**Lecture and discussion** – Define active listening. Active listening involves listening with full attention as shown by using warm and open body language. Discuss characteristics of open and warm body language as related to active listening. Open and warm body language is characterized by a smile, open gestures, eye contact, head nod for agreement, forward leaning, and use of speaker’s name. Active listening is significant because it makes the speaker feel important and it can lead to the discovery of a connection or commonality. Share several anecdotes of unusual connections I have made with people and the significance of those connections. Common topics for making a connection – pets, schools attended, common friends, hobbies, states or cities lived in.

Discuss quote by Nathan Miller: “Conversation in the United States is an exercise in which the first person to draw a breath is declared the listener.”

Discuss quote by Dianna Booher: “Listening is not waiting your turn to talk.”

**Large group activity** – Ask them to share any unusual commonalities or connections they have made with others in the past.

**Small group activity** – Trainees to work in pairs. One to tell a short story and the other to practice active listening using warm and open body language. Seek to find a connection or commonality. Share with the group.

**Materials needed** – Flipchart #5 and markers. Session 2 Handout.

**2. Identify an interest(s) of the other person by responding with related comments and asking open questions.**

Time allotted— 40 minutes

**Lecture and discussion** – Define open questions and closed questions (Booher, 1994)). Discuss the significance of open questions in keeping a conversation going. Explain the concept of taking turns while engaged in conversation.

Recognize and give examples of conversation stoppers (Fine, 2005).

Discuss quote by Herbert V. Prochinow: “Talk to anyone about himself and he will listen without interrupting.”

Discuss quote by Bill Carruth: “The secret of being interesting is to be interested.”

**Large group activity** – Ask for a volunteer to challenge trainer to a game of Tic Tac Putt Golf. One golf club will be used by both players. The point is to reinforce the concept of taking turns in conversation.

**Large group activity** – Trainees will read aloud scripts of good examples and bad examples of keeping a conversation going. Trainees will discuss how scripts of bad examples can be turned into good examples by using these concepts.

**Small group activity** – Trainees to work in pairs. They will converse with the goal of identifying an interest of the other person.

**Materials needed** – Flipchart #6 and markers. Three scripts of good and bad examples of keeping a conversation going. Tic Tac Putt Golf Game and one golf club to be shared. Session 2 Handout.

**Session 3 – Ending a Conversation**

*At the end of Session 3, trainees will be able to:*

**1. Give examples of how to politely close a conversation** (Fine, 2005).

Time allotted – 5 minutes

**Lecture and discussion** - Ways to close a conversation with tact. Politely excuse yourself to attend to another commitment. Explain that now is not a good time to visit and suggest another time. End with a word of good will.

**Materials needed** – Session 3 Handout. Flipchart #7 and Course Evaluation.



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## Bibliography

Booher, D. (1994). *Communicate with confidence*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Booher includes more than a thousand tips regarding most types of communication. Her tips cover both business and social settings. Chapters address topics such as one-on-one conversation and listening skills.

Carnegie, D. (1981). *How to win friends and influence people* (revised ed.). New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Carnegie discusses techniques on how to make friends as well as manage one's sphere of influence. He offers very practical advice with anecdotes to illustrate his point(s). His techniques relate to being interested in the other person and finding out about their passions.

Fine, D. (2005). *The fine art of small talk*. New York: Hyperion.

Fine pleads the case for the need for skills relating to small talk and conversation. She shares from her own experience as an introverted engineer. She offers practical information useful in beginning, maintaining, and ending a conversation.

Social skills: promoting positive behavior, academic success, and school safety (2002) [Electronic version]. *NASP Fact Sheet* Retrieved August 26, 2009 from [http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/socialskills\\_fs.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/socialskills_fs.aspx).

Author discusses in this article how success in social skills creates an environment conducive to academic success and safety. He offers the solution that if students are taught better social skills that their overall school

environment would be safer and more conducive to learning. This article helps to plead the case for better social skills within the school setting.

Verderber, K.S., Verderber, R. F., & Berryman-Fink, C. (2007) *Inter-Act* (11<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

These authors stress the importance of all interpersonal skills and their benefits. Skills such as how to hold a conversation, handling conflict, and the proper use of body language are discussed.

Ziglar, Z. (2006) *Better than good*. Nashville: Integrity Publishers.

Ziglar writes a motivational book with many helpful hints on how to have a positive outlook on life no matter the circumstances. He also addresses how people are to be treated. Through the use of humor and anecdotes, he stresses the importance of people.

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***PRESENTING YOU - The Give and Take of Conversation*****POSTTEST**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Rate your training skill using a 1-5 scale.

1 = low skill and 5 = high skill

\_\_\_\_\_ I am aware that conversation is essential for personal and professional success. 1A

\_\_\_\_\_ I introduce myself and meet people with confidence. 1B

\_\_\_\_\_ I have a handshake that fits my personality. 1B

\_\_\_\_\_ I engage and maintain eye contact with the other person during an introduction. 1B

\_\_\_\_\_ I make sure to use the other person's name during an introduction. 1B

\_\_\_\_\_ I smile during an introduction. 1B

\_\_\_\_\_ I select appropriate icebreakers or conversation starters for social settings. 1C

\_\_\_\_\_ I select appropriate icebreakers or conversation starters for business settings. 1C

\_\_\_\_\_ I engage in active listening by demonstrating open and warm body language. 2A

\_\_\_\_\_ I make an effort to discover a connection or commonality with the other person. 2A

\_\_\_\_\_ I make related comments and ask related questions to identify the speaker's topic(s) of interest. 2B

\_\_\_\_\_ I practice the concept of taking turns while conversing. 2B

\_\_\_\_\_ I recognize conversation stoppers and avoid them. 2B

\_\_\_\_\_ I close the conversation politely. 3A

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Points

***PRESENTING YOU – The Give and Take of Conversation***

**COURSE EVALUATION**

Instructor Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate 1-10 with 10 the highest rating possible.

Rate the instructor:

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Comments:

Rate the course content:

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Comments:

Content that you found to be most beneficial:

Content that you found to be least beneficial:

How did you hear about the course?

If referred, who referred you?

Thank you for your comments and for being a part of our class.



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# Training Materials

## ***PRESENTING YOU SESSION 1 HANDOUT***

### **Beginning a Conversation**

**What is conversation?** An exchange of information between 2 or more people through talking and listening which results in a sharing of thoughts, feelings, ideas, interests, and experiences.

**Three reasons why the ability to engage in conversation is important:**

1. Can lead to close relationships
2. Can lead to a safer school environment
3. Can lead to success in the workplace

**The HENS method of introduction:**

H – Handshake

E – Eye contact

N – Use of name

S – Smile

**Four categories of icebreakers (conversation starters) appropriate for social and business/school settings and an example of each.**

*A. Refer to the physical context.*

Social: “This is great weather for a game, isn’t it?”

Business: The remodeled offices look great. When they will be finished?

*B. Refer to your thoughts and feelings.*

Social: “I thought the movie last night was great! What did you think about it?”

Business: “I like our new policy of Fridays off. What about you?”

*C. Refer to another person.*

Social: "Tom will be at the game tonight. Are you planning to go?"

Business: "I don't believe we've met before. Do you work with Sue?"

*D. Use humor or a light-hearted remark.*

Social: "Isn't it great how we have had 30 days of 100+degrees temperature?"

Business: "The price of our health insurance keeps going up while our benefits keep going down."



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## ***PRESENTING YOU SESSION 2 HANDOUT***

### **Keeping a Conversation Going**

#### **Active listening.**

What is active listening?

Active listening involves listening with full attention as shown by using warm and open body language.

Characteristics of active listening:

Smile, open gestures, eye contact, head nod for agreement, forward leaning, use of speaker's name.

The significance of active listening:

Makes the speaker feel important

Can lead to the discovery of a connection or commonality

#### **Identifying a connection or commonality by responding with related comments and asking open questions.**

Closed questions vs. open questions.

Example of closed question – Do you like to play golf?

Example of open question – What are some of your hobbies?

Open questions are more conducive to identifying a connection or commonality with the other person.



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***PRESENTING YOU SESSION 3 HANDOUT***

**Ending a Conversation**

**Examples of how to politely close a conversation.**

I must leave now as I have someone waiting.

Can we discuss this another time? This is not a good time for me.

**End with a word of good will.**

Tell your family that I said hi.

Hope to see you soon.



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***PRESENTING YOU QUOTES HANDOUT***

**The Give and Take of Conversation**

Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest sound in any language.

*Dale Carnegie*

Conversation in the United States is an exercise in which the first person to draw a breath is declared the listener. *Nathan Miller*

Listening is not waiting your turn to talk. *Dianna Booher*

Talk to anyone about himself and he will listen without interrupting. *Herbert V.*

*Prochinow*

The secret to being interesting is to be interested. *Bill Carruth*



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***PRESENTING YOU FLASHCARDS***

**The Give and Take of Conversation**

To be used in Session 1

Make 10 copies on card stock. Cut apart and laminate. Mix them up and distribute one set per small group.

Conversation is  
the exchange  
of information  
between two  
or more

people through

talking and

listening which

results in

a sharing

of thoughts

feelings

ideas

interests

and

experiences

## ***PRESENTING YOU FLIP CHART PAGES***

### **The Give and Take of Conversation**

#### **Flipchart #1 – Session 1**

Welcome to PRESENTING YOU....to make a difference.

How to Engage in Effective Conversation

Trainer – Robin Hutchins

#### **Flipchart #2 – Session 1**

Definition of Conversation: Conversation is an exchange of information between 2 or more people through talking and listening which results in a sharing of thoughts, feelings, ideas, interests, and experiences.

#### **Flipchart #3 – Session 1**

H – Handshake

E – Eye contact

N – Use of person's name

S – Smile

#### **Flipchart #4 – Session 2**

4 Categories of Icebreakers

Refer to physical context.

Refer to thoughts and feelings.

Refer to another person.

Use of humor or light-hearted remark.

#### **Flipchart # 5 – Session 2 – to be developed in class**

Characteristics of warm and open body language

- Smile
- Open gestures
- Eye contact
- Head nod to show agreement
- Forward leaning
- Use of speaker's name

### **Flipchart #6 – Session 2**

Closed/Open Questions

Closed questions – answers come from a closed set

Example – Do you want to go to the library?

Open questions – answers come from an open set

Example – Where would you like to go tonight?

### **Flipchart #7 – End of Session 3 – while they fill out the Course Evaluation**

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Thank you for taking the course.



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***PRESENTING YOU – The Give and Take of Conversation***

**SCRIPT # 1 – To be used in Session 2**

Talking Ted

Ted: I had quite a weekend. I went to the mall and there was a robbery.

Grace: Really? I went to the mall, too.

Ted: Yea, I was at the Parks Mall in Dallas on Saturday night.

Grace: We were there, too.

Ted: Yea , I went to look for some new running shoes. I heard the robbery happened in the afternoon so I just missed it.

Grace: So, did you find some shoes? We saw several shoe stores there.

Ted: Yes, I got a new pair of Nikes at the Footlocker. I got a pretty good deal, too.

Grace: That's great. It's always fun to find a good deal.

**SCRIPT # 2 – To be used in Session 2**

Quiet Kelly

Brad: How was your weekend? Did you do anything fun?

Kelly: Yes, we went to the mall.

Brad: Really? What were you shopping for?

Kelly: We were looking for a winter coat.

Brad: Did you find one?

Kelly: Yea.

Brad: Where did you find it?

Kelly: I found it at Dillard's.

Brad: I like to shop there. I can usually find some good deals on the clearance rack.

**SCRIPT # 3 – To be used in Session 2**

Conversation Carol

Don: How was your weekend? Did you do anything fun?

Carol: Yes – we did. Paula and I went ice skating and then we shopped at the mall for a winter coat.

Don: Really? I went to the mall, too. Which one did you go to?

Carol: We went to the Parks Mall south of Dallas. Have you been to that mall before?

Don: That's the one I went to. Did you hear that they had a robbery on Saturday afternoon?

Carol: No, I did not know that. Were you there at that time? I hope not.

Don: No, I was there later that night. What about you? When were you and Paula there?

Carol: We were there early that morning. Wow – it looks like we both just missed all of the excitement!



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